

**Testimony of Nathan Frohling, Director of External Affairs
Before the Environment Committee
February 25, 2022**

in qualified support of HB No. 5140

AAC THE HAND-HARVESTING OF HORSESHOE CRABS IN THE STATE

Thank you Co-Chairs Senator Cohen and Representative Gresko, Vice-Chairs Senator Slap and Representative Palm, Ranking Members Senator Miner and Representative Harding, and all honorable members of the Environment Committee for this opportunity to testify on HB 5140.

The Nature Conservancy in CT (TNC) expresses qualified support for HB-5140.

The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. That mission has taken us to conserving the ecosystem and wildlife species of Long Island Sound for which we have dedicated considerable attention in the last 10 years and more. We have learned about the ecological importance of one of the oldest creatures to inhabit the Sound: horseshoe crabs. In addition to being intrinsically valuable in their own right, these animals play a role in the food webs and other ecological processes of the Sound. That role has been diminished in modern times by the decline of these species.

It is important to sustain the horseshoe crab for ecological reasons and help in its recovery by managing the extent of human harvest. The practical benefit of these animals for potential future human use will also be better served if horseshoe crab populations can recover and be sustained.

With both ecological and human economic interests at stake it appears necessary to place appropriate constraints on the human harvest of these animals and as such we support HB-5140 in concept. We are also aware that recently, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEEP) published regulations concerning the hand-harvesting of horseshoe crabs that would substantially curtail harvest within the commercial fishery and enhance horseshoe crab reproductive success by protecting crabs from disturbance during key spawning periods. Although these regulations still need to be reviewed by the General Assembly's Regulation Review Committee, they represent an approach that addresses the decline of horseshoe crabs. DEEP suggests that these regulations could be sufficient to meet the challenge with the ability to respond further if needed.

We understand that a complete ban on harvest could have a significant impact on those in the horseshoe crab and whelk fisheries. Finding the right balance is key. We support HB-1540 in calling attention to the need to protect horseshoe crabs and offering a path to actually protect them. We also recognize there may be a regulatory solution that is less disruptive to those who rely on this fishery. We are not the experts at this time in discerning the details of the best path forward between these two approaches and would support either the regulatory approach or the

more absolute measures stated in the bill if the latter is deemed necessary. In this regard we offer qualified support for HB-1540 in taking necessary action on this issue in addition to raising attention to this issue but if the regulatory approach is deemed reasonable and sufficient at this time we would also support that approach as a more measured action with less impact on those immediately affected.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.